



# Worship the Lord

*Sharing worship ideas with WELS pastors*

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## CONTEMPLATIVE WORSHIP AT A WOMEN'S RETREAT

This issue, the third in a series of five, shares the potential and value of a quiet service in a retreat setting. Worship "around a gentle bonfire as the sun was setting" suggests possibilities not only for a women's retreat but also for a youth outing or other times.

Note the emphasis on careful planning, rehearsing a choir or soloist(s), and teaching new elements to the worshippers. Such attention to detail is beneficial not only

for a retreat but also any time new material is introduced to the congregation.

Retreat participants report that a quiet and contemplative service was a highlight of the weekend. This isn't surprising. Some participants at every School of Worship Enrichment also say that *Compline* was a highlight for them even though other services offered more energetic or lively worship options.

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*Bryan Gerlach*

## "Be Still and Know" By Cindi Holman

I have vivid childhood memories of my mother standing at the backyard fence or sitting at the kitchen table chatting away with a neighbor or friend. They paused from their daily chores to enjoy a cup of coffee and endless conversation. Their conversations covered a broad spectrum of topics: the local news, parenting issues, a new recipe, or gardening techniques. They laughed, sometimes cried, encouraged each other, and deepened a bond. Many of those friendships are strong to this day because of the depth of the relationship built over the fence or at the kitchen table when each of them simply stopped and listened to each other.

My generation hasn't done as well at carrying on those traditions. Our lives are a blur of activities. Every day is filled with a list of things to do and places to be. We can be guilty of making that "to do" list more important than anything else. We have had to learn to build relationships in creative ways. One creative way to reconnect with others is a women's retreat. It's a chance to get away from the list of responsibilities and spend time with friends. It's a weekend to stop, slow down, and focus on relationships and on being in God's Word. Most retreats have a clear biblical theme that reinforces or



teaches something about God and what he has done for us. It can be an ideal setting for a contemplative worship service.

The St. Mark's Women's Retreat in northern California has been using *Prayer at the Close of Day* or *Evening Prayer* for several years. It quickly became the service that the women eagerly anticipated. The settings for these services varied, depending on the retreat site for a particular year. One year the women gathered around a gentle bonfire as the sun was setting and sang (unaccompanied) the hymnal's *Service of Light*. Another time they met around a roaring bonfire at the ocean. A small choir rehearsed before the retreat

and served as cantor and accompaniment by leading the singing. The simplicity of the service was remarkably effective. Because most of the attendees were familiar with the *Service of Light* from their congregations, they could focus on the service and hear it with new ears in this unique setting. Members of the choir took turns reading the prayers and scripture readings. Familiar hymns that fit the theme of the retreat were carefully chosen.

When *Prayer at the Close of Day* became available, the retreat began to use it for one of the evening services. Because this service was new to most of the attendees, some

preparation of the worshipers was necessary. At the beginning of a couple of breaks or new sessions, we spent a few minutes teaching all the attendees the portions they would be singing. A choir rehearsed before coming to the retreat, so they were able to add support while others were learning. The first year the choir led all the cantor sections and read the prayers and Scripture readings. They also sang the Song of Simeon. The following year the congregation joined in singing the Song of Simeon. The Lord's Prayer was either spoken or sung by the choir. St. Mark's congregation had started using this service for midweek Advent and Lenten services, so the service was familiar to many of those attending. As with a quiet Evening Prayer service, the response was extremely positive. The quiet character of the service and the slower tempos provided a worship setting that focused on the Word. A piano or quiet sound from an electronic keyboard provided the accompaniment. After a full day the opportunity to sit, be still, listen to the Word, and worship quietly was wonderful.

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Several factors are key to making this worship experience a positive one, especially if this approach to worship is new to most of those attending.

- Hymns and songs are chosen carefully. They should be meaningful and familiar to most of those who will participate in the service. The character of the music should fit the contemplative nature of the service.
- A small choir and/or soloist(s) prepare in advance. This allows them to lead confidently and to lend support to those who are new to the service. Their enthusiasm about the service encourages those hesitant to experience something unfamiliar. It also helps to tell worshipers that it's okay just to sit and listen, joining in the singing only when comfortable. Simply meditating on the worship can be a wonderful introduction to this kind of worship.
- It is possible—and may be necessary—to use only selected sections of the service at first and gradually add other parts. Some sections can be very effective when spoken responsively. Knowing your group of worshipers and introducing things slowly can make the end result far more positive. The goal is worship that brings people down from the hectic pace of life to a quiet place where they can be still and focus on God.
- Before the service (often at the end of the day's last session) the retreat participants are informed about the nature of the service. They are encouraged to come to the service ready to be in a quiet place, leaving all the energy of the day behind. The preservice music (if any) lends to the setting.
- Careful attention is given to distinguish between quiet and overly serious. Texts that reflect what God in his love has done for us and our joyful response to him and his Word are the clear message. The goal is a quiet service, not somber, a service that reflects awe for God's mercy and love to us.

"Be Still and Know" was the theme of a recent retreat. The Compline service gave attendees an opportunity to be still and quietly hear the message of the Gospel. It was a time to strengthen our bond with the Lord through his Word. For many women who are retreat regulars this service is a highlight of the weekend. Several factors seem to make it so: the quiet simplicity of worship at the end of a day filled with rich Bible study, the uniqueness of a congregation of only women joined in song, and being far from the responsibilities of daily life.

*"Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46).*



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## CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: OCCASIONAL SERVICES AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP: PASTOR'S COMPANION

The Commission on Worship is pleased to announce that two long-awaited resources are finally released this summer.

*Christian Worship: Pastor's Companion* contains the texts for 24 rites including: visits with the sick, private Communion and Baptism, graveside services, various devotions, and many more. The book also contains Scripture texts, prayers, hymn verses, and other devotional aids that are useful for a variety of ministry situations.

*Christian Worship: Occasional Services* provides rites for special occasions (for example, baptisms, weddings, and funerals with options beyond those in the hymnal). Special services for Prayer at Close of Day (Compline) and Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter are also included in the book's 360 pages. Additional musical resources include songs and psalms for cantor/soloist, choir, and/or congregation. Most of the service texts are provided as electronic RTF files on a CD-ROM along with TIF graphic files of music for the congregation. These components simplify reproduction of rites and services in worship folders. An accompaniment edition of 128 pages provides a wealth of musical resources, especially for services related to the church year.

Those attending NPH's summer music workshops at five different Midwestern locations will be introduced to some of the musical resources in CWOS along with other new musical resources. Those unable to attend one of these workshops may register by the middle of July to receive the materials. See the flyer from NPH or visit [www.nph.et/music/workshop](http://www.nph.et/music/workshop) to sign up.

Lots of worship planning happens during the summer months. Parishes considering a contemplative worship option for a retreat, midweek Advent, or some other setting now have two sources for the WELS Compline service: *Christian Worship: New Service Settings* and CWOS. Two different musical versions are included in both publications with a variety of accompaniment options.